

August 31, 2005

VICKSBURG, MS — Although the category four winds, rains and storm surge have dissipated, residents of the City of New Orleans are struggling to begin the long journey to take back their city from Mother Nature.

Major flooding continues to be a great problem in the city and surrounding parishes. One source of flooding has been the August 30 overtopping and subsequent breaching of the London Avenue Canal floodwall at 6100 Pratt Drive. Corps personnel are continuing to evaluate information on the breaching and are developing plans to seal it off. One element of this plan is to use up-to-3,000-pound sand bags on the 17 Street Canal. Army National Guard Chinook helicopters are expected to begin assisting in the operation Aug. 31.

Access to breach sites continues to hamper efforts to close them. Barges and cranes cannot be moved through the Industrial Canal due to motor vessels and other large debris blocking the canal. Vessels must go around and through the Gulf Inner-Coastal Waterway (GIWW) or the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet. The Mississippi River is closed to vessel traffic from Southwest Pass to Natchez, MS. The Army National Guard, U.S. Army, U.S. Coast Guard, other federal and state authorities, and private contractors are all working alongside the Corps to bring in necessary materials, supplies and equipment to begin making inroads to the damage.

The Corps is working with two major contractors to determine the scope of unwatering services available to inundated areas.

The Corps of Engineers Motor Vessel Kirby Responder is surveying the GIWW from Pascagoula, MS, towards New Orleans with U.S. Coast Guard Aids to Navigation (ATON) personnel on board. They will survey Baptiste Collette Aug. 31, weather permitting. The survey vessel LaFourche is currently surveying the condition of the navigation channel from Baton Rouge to Southwest Pass.

Corps of Engineers motor vessels are delivering barges with cranes and excavating equipment and critical recovery materials.

The Port Allen Lock reopened Aug. 30 and remains on auxiliary power. Algiers Lock and Harvey Lock are operating. The Industrial Canal Lock (IHNC) is operating on emergency generator and the lock is expected to be operational in the near future. The canal is blocked with vessels, loose barges and boats. All other Corps of Engineers waterway facilities are open for normal operations.

The Port Allen Lock has been designated as a staging area for Federal Emergency Management Activities (FEMA) and Corps of Engineers activities. In support of FEMA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is contracting for:

- emergency clearance of debris to enable reconnaissance and movement of emergency personnel and equipment

- temporary construction of emergency access routes, including damaged streets, roads, bridges, ports, waterways, airfields, and any other facilities necessary for passage of rescue personnel
- emergency restoration of critical public services and facilities including supplying adequate amounts of drinking water, temporary restoration of water supply systems and providing water for fire fighting
- emergency demolition or stabilization of damaged structures and facilities as designated by state or local governments
- immediate emergency supplies including ice and water
- emergency power generation at critical sites (hospitals, shelters, etc.)
- temporary roofing and temporary housing
- technical assistance and damage assessment, including structural inspection of structures
- unwatering (assist the State of Louisiana by performing and or contracting for the unwatering of the City of New Orleans and the greater metropolitan area)

While the Corps is coordinating public works and engineering activities under FEMA, it will also provide direct assistance under Flood Control and Coastal Emergency authorities.

Aerial reconnaissance of the region has been conducted. Corps ground reconnaissance teams have observed that most houses have major damage to their roofs and expect roofing to be a huge mission. Communications also continues to be a major issue.

Corps teams forward in the area have been unable to contact all parish emergency officials and determine pump station conditions. They are currently contacting Levee Boards to determine local capabilities for assistance in filling breeches, evaluating the extent of damage, etc., and are coordinating with the Louisiana Emergency Operations Center.

The Corps has also maintained close communication with US Geological Service regarding water stage data in Louisiana. Gage data for Lake Pontchartrain indicates that Lake Pontchartrain is slowly draining. Based on the present rate of fall observed for the last eight hours, the lake level should return to normal level in about 36 hours.

As recovery efforts continue to gather momentum, numerous U.S. Army Corps of Engineers personnel from across the nation are arriving in the region to add their efforts and skills to the daunting mission ahead. The nationwide effort is involving several federal government agencies under FEMA and numerous contractors as the city and region take their first steps toward the future.

For more information, contact the New Orleans District Public Affairs Office at the crisis action center (601) 631-5328.